

Engagement with the Armed Forces

Committee name	Corporate, Finance and Property Select Committee
Officer reporting	John Wheatley Health Integration and Voluntary Sector Partnerships
Papers with report	None
Ward	All

HEADLINES

The report has been prepared at the Committee's request, to provide an overview of the Council's engagement with the Armed Forces.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Committee:

1. Notes the report.

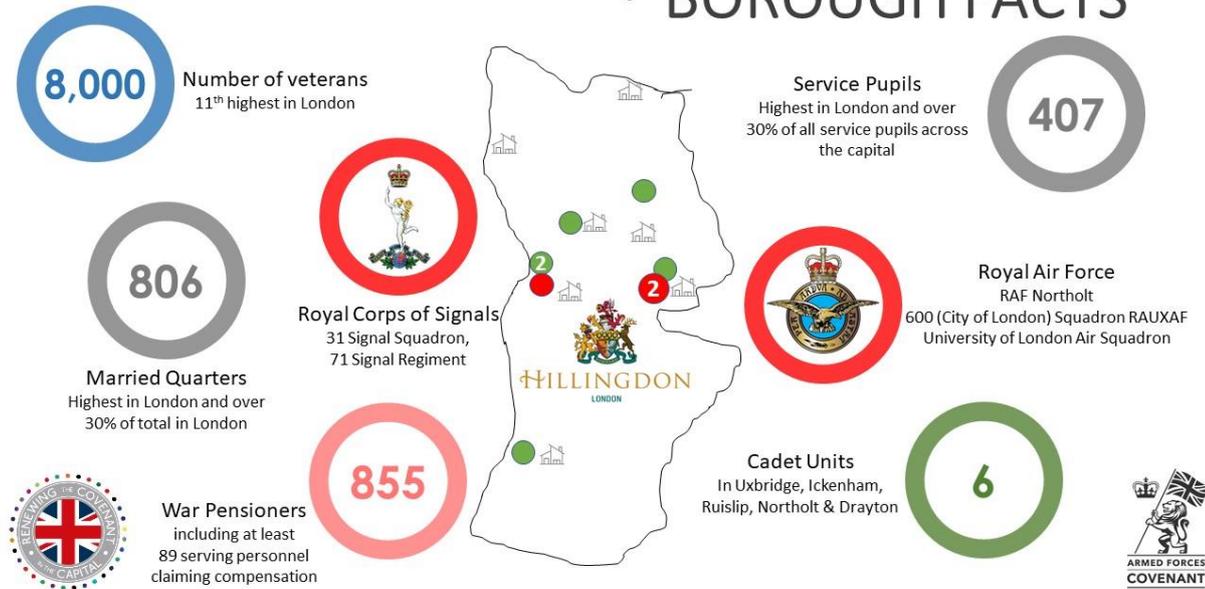
SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Hillingdon context

Hillingdon has the largest number of serving Armed Forces personnel of all the London Boroughs. There are over 800 service people and families based in Hillingdon due to the presence of RAF Northolt and Northwood HQ. 600 (City of London) Squadron RAUXAF and University of London Squadron are based at Northolt along with the Royal Corp of Signals, 31 Signal Squadron and 71 Signal Regiment, together with several other units representing all three armed services.

Around 4% of Hillingdon's population are veterans which is about average. There are an estimated 8000 veterans living in Hillingdon, along with 855 war pensioners. In addition, Hillingdon has 6 cadet units, in Uxbridge, Ickenham, Ruislip, Northwood and West Drayton. Hillingdon schools have 407 service pupils on their rolls; the highest of any London borough and representing over 30% of all service pupils across London.

BOROUGH FACTS



The Armed Forces Covenant is an agreement between the armed forces community, the nation and the government. It encapsulates the moral obligation to those who serve or have served, their families and the bereaved.

The covenant's twin underlying principles are that:

- members of the armed forces community should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services; and
- special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given the most such as the injured or the bereaved.

The Queen's Speech 2021 announced the Government's intention to strengthen the Covenant by placing it on a statutory footing. The Defence Secretary, Ben Wallace, said:

"The Armed Forces Covenant has mitigated disadvantage arising from Service for our armed forces and their families since its introduction. It is this government's aim to build upon this great work, as such it will progress proposals to further incorporate the Covenant into law to mitigate any disadvantage faced by the armed forces community due to the unique nature of military service."

The London Borough of Hillingdon was proud to sign the Armed Forces Community Covenant in June 2012.

Back then, the Council appointed Councillor Douglas Mills, Cabinet Member for Community, Commerce and Regeneration as its Armed Forces Champion, supported by a senior level Partnership Board and backed by an officer who acts as the contact point for the Community Covenant. The Partnership Board no longer meets. Members agreed that they would meet as necessary if there were matters requiring discussion. The current Cabinet Scheme of Delegations gives the Leader of the Council the responsibility to oversee the Council's relationship with the

Armed Services. In addition to this, the previous Leader of the Council, Cllr Sir Ray Puddifoot MBE became the new Armed Forces Champion on 14 January 2021.

Housing allocations

Hillingdon Council recognises the disadvantage that Service personnel often face in accessing public services and has responded to this by including an exception to the usual 10-year residency requirement and providing additional priority in the Social Housing Allocation Policy. The April 2021 Policy states that

“the council will ensure that greater priority through ‘additional preference’ is given to applicants who have a long attachment to the borough, are working, members of the British Armed Forces and childless couples.”

There is also extra priority given as a local policy to members of the armed forces, veterans, family members who are bereaved, and serving or former reserves.

School places

Within the national School Admissions Code, admissions authorities must follow prescribed arrangements. This includes allocating a school place in advance of a child moving to the area when supporting information has been provided to evidence that a move will take place.

The Council has also set up a dedicated web page on admissions for forces families to draw attention to the national Schools Admissions Code, which introduced provisions intended to ensure that children of UK service personnel are not disadvantaged when applying for schools as a result of being posted at various locations. The provisions do not give automatic priority to service children over other children or guarantee that service children will get a place at a particular school.

We have built up good relations with London Region MOD who refer occasional cases to us, which are swiftly investigated.

Support for armed forces/Northolt

Hillingdon has previously made two successful applications to the (now closed) community covenant grant scheme to help build stronger links between residents and armed forces personnel. These grants helped the Council support the Public Open Days at RAF Northolt Base. The Council has also provided considerable logistical support to RAF Northolt to hold these engagement events.

As part of their Centenary celebrations RAF Northolt personnel paraded through Uxbridge to exercise their Freedom of the Borough. The Homecoming Parade organised for 63 Squadron when they returned from an Afghanistan deployment was attended by over 20,000 people.

The Council has arranged several fishing days during the summer months for armed forces personnel returning from operational deployments, to provide opportunities to relax with their families.

We also ensure that all personnel who live on the base are issued with a Hillingdon First card which gives them access to a range of discounts in the Borough leisure facilities and car parks. We also provided the RAF Cadets with a new minibus.

The Council invested £6m in the Education and Visitor Centre at the historic Battle of Britain Bunker on the former RAF Uxbridge site. This provides first-class visitor and conference facilities at the site where Sir Winston Churchill witnessed events on 15 September 1940, the most significant day of the Battle of Britain.

Hillingdon was awarded a Silver Award under the Government's Employer Recognition Scheme, in recognition of the excellent support that we give to our Reservists.

We celebrate Armed Forces Day annually and have held a series of special events including flag raising ceremonies, veterans' tea parties, and a public band concert.

We are particularly proud of our links with veterans' groups and charities. The Council supported our local Normandy Veterans to make several trips to the Normandy beaches and all were awarded the Civic Medal of the Borough in recognition of their wartime contributions. The Council assisted Normandy Veterans with applications to be awarded the Legion D'Honneur by the French Government. We have provided our local Gurkha community, many of whom have served with British armed forces, with dedicated space at one of our cemeteries.

The Council also supports the work of the Polish Air Force Memorial Committee and has jointly funded the cleaning of the Grade 2 Polish War Memorial in conjunction with the Polish Embassy.

We actively support Remembrance Sunday events in all of our major centres and hold a Two Minute Silence Ceremony on the Civic Centre Forecourt on 11 November each year which includes the launch of maroon rockets across the Borough to signify the start and finish of the silence. In addition, we have cleaned and restored all the War Memorials in the Borough.

Commemorative VC plaques were laid in Harefield to mark the centenary of WW1 and the village green was dedicated as a 'centenary field' to preserve the area in perpetuity. We also compiled a detailed record of the background behind every named individual on WW1 war memorials in Hillingdon, publishing the results as a book 'We will remember them' displayed in each of our libraries.

Implications on related Council policies

A role of the Select Committees is to make recommendations on service changes and improvements to the Cabinet who are responsible for the Council's policy and direction.

How this report benefits Hillingdon residents

This report sets out the benefits of the Armed Forces to Hillingdon residents.

Financial Implications

None.

Legal Implications

Not applicable.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.